

# Urban Planning and Governmental Proliferation in Ghana's Port City of Tema

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My on-going concern with governmental border zones and the structuring of material life motivates a new project I am undertaking in Ghana's port city of Tema, where I was based from June through December 2011. Funded by a Fulbright-Hays Award and the UF Center for Humanities and the Public Sphere, my research in Tema addresses the impact of urban planning on public life and spatial ordering in the city. Countering prevailing accounts of African urban cities which emphasize the organic logics of informality, migration and uncontained sprawl, the project seeks insight into the dynamics of African urbanism by taking seriously the reach of governing authorities and their grip on the terms and pace of urban development and the practices and experiences of urban dwellers.

Tema presents a particularly fascinating case of long-range urban planning in Africa. On par with other high modernist urban schemes of the post-war era, from Brasilia and British New towns, to American suburbs and Soviet industrial cities, Tema was established shortly after Ghana gained independence in 1957. The city was the brainchild of Ghana's first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, and world-renowned urbanist Constantin Doxiadis, who sought to launch Ghana into a fully modern future unhampered by its pre-industrial past or cultural distinctions separating citizens from each other and an emerging global economic ecumene.

My research in Tema combines ethnography, institutional and architectural history and archival research to investigate the governing bodies involved in formulating and implementing strategies of urban management over the city's half century of existence. It is equally concerned with the experiences of Tema's residents as they negotiate the city's tightly conceived and largely preformatted built environment. Given my underlying concern as a political anthropologist with the spectrum of political



possibilities allying the governed and the ungoverned, of particular interest to me are the forms of public life that flourish in the interstices between Tema's highly scripted master plan and residents' own aspirations for success and upward mobility amidst the contingencies of contemporary urban existence.

At the center of my research is the state-owned Tema Development Corporation, an entity that holds nearly exclusive *de jure* control of the city's lands, building codes and development schemes. Resulting in a tenuous ruling coalition, cooperating and competing with TDC in the de facto governance of the city are the Tema Metropolitan Assembly, Tema Traditional Council, and Tema Port Authority. In this overly-ruled yet fractured political landscape, new solutions for urban living arise among both the city's rich and poor, inspiring in turn new forms of urban regulation and contests among the designated agents of urban governance.

This dialectic of urban planning, alter-planning, and replanning is evident across a range of locations and processes, from the conditions of urban sanitation and sewerage, and the layout and use of commercial space, to the practices of residential building and demolition. In short, my research suggests that in the city of Tema, and likely other African urban formations, the ordering and dis-ordering of the urban landscape is an outcome of regulatory profusion as much as lack thereof.

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